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# **From the Child to the Pupil to the Child. Trust Based on Categorical Inequalities and the Quest for Alternatives Towards a More Inclusive Education**

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# From the Child to the Pupil to the Child. Trust Based on Categorical Inequalities and the Quest for Alternatives Towards a More Inclusive Education

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*Abstract:* This article discusses the function of trust as a medium of communication specialised in creating the conditions for the acceptance of educational communication, therefore in creating the conditions for the education system to fulfil its societal function. The specific contribution offered by the article is to introduce a form of trust, *trust based on categorical inequalities*, arguing for its pivotal role in structuring educational communication. However, the article also discusses that, to fulfil its function, that is, to generate stability and allow expectations to be constructed, trust based on categorical inequalities legitimizes self-fulfilling prophecies of academic achievements and failures. The side effects of trust based on categorical inequalities are all related to dis-trust: marginalisation, disempowerment, exclusion of some children. Based on the argument developed, the article concludes by inviting reflection on possible, more inclusive, forms of trust that are based on the replacement of the *pupil*, the self-reassuring as well as daunting persona generated by the semantics of education, with the *child*, as the internal reference of the education system.

*Keywords:* trust, marginalization, unintended consequences, empowerment, agency

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## **Introduction. Some sociological observations on the ambitions and limits of the education system**

One of the characteristics of European modernity and its global ramifications, is a socio-cultural process known as ‘the discovery of the child’. Since the seventeenth century, a construct called ‘childhood’ has appeared, gradually but irresistibly, as a structural component of all social systems (Ariés, 1962; Cunningham, 2005). Social systems such as the arts, families, law, health, politics, economics and science have contributed, each one from its specific perspective and language, to the generation of a multidimensional, complex, often contradictory but nevertheless solid semantics of ‘childhood in society’.

Professional practices and discourses have been crossing, clashing, converging and diverging within and across social systems, mixing and overlapping. The result is a panoply of portraits of the same subject, the child, painted with a wide range of ideas and beliefs concerning its capabilities, the value of its agency and the possibility for its self-determination.

However, no other social system has been more fascinated by the child than education. Both as an external reference, the child in its journey to adulthood, and as an internal reference, the pupil to be educated, the child has invariably captured the attention of education, to a point that from the late nineteenth century, education has become, concurrently to the family, ‘the social system of childhood’.

It can be argued whether the tension feeding the educational debate (and the debate on education in society) that generates the perpetual condition of reform and self-reform of the education system (Baraldi & Corsi, 2016) is nurtured by the education’s fascination for an object, the child, who is necessarily out of its reach. The education system reproduces itself over time through chains of communications. The connectivity between acts of communications is secured (although necessarily imperfectly) by shared meanings, expectations and structures (Luhmann & Schorr, 1982; Luhmann, 1995; Baraldi & Corsi, 2016). *Educational communication* refers to the operations within the education system that allow the reproduction of the system itself. The child who participates in education, the pupil, a product of educational communication. Luhmann (1995) describes the pupil as a persona, that is used to construct expectations and to serve as a reference for communication. The pupil that sheds its skin at every educational stage is construct that offers a reference for the measurement and assessment of children *within* education, for educational purposes. What is assessed, measured, corrected, reformed, praised is the pupil. The ‘true’ children, the individual psychic systems, are something very different from the pupils. Children sit outside of educational communication, that is

and there is always the possibility for them to avoid or subvert education, even at very young, pre-scholar age (Dotson, et al. 2015; Scollan & Gallagher, 2016).

The characteristic anxiety pervading the educational discourse is generated by the diverging forces of fascination and inaccessibility emanating from the child. Sociological theory and research have highlighted the role of education in the reproduction of culture and therefore of the whole societal system from a structuralist point of view (Parsons, 1961; Parsons & Bales, 1965) as well as from a critical perspective (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Besozzi, 2009), including the discussion of an ancillary role of education for capitalist labour market (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). However, the discourse in education on education has been less than controversial: education advocates the function of *forming* children, creating cognitive abilities that are necessary for them to adapt to social norms (Luhmann & Schorr, 1982). When mass education was introduced, the educational discourse on childhood, that is, pedagogy, used to entertain a relatively secure relationship with its object on the one hand (the child) and its function on the other hand (the education of the child). Understood as a linear process, education was based on linear logic, devising pedagogical means to achieve its goals. Utilising the language of more critical account of the traditional pedagogical discourse, classic pedagogy was a form of self-description where education understood itself as means of correction for 'the sin of childhood' (Britzman, 2007). Within the traditional pedagogical discourse, the image of the child's capabilities and the space for its agency and self-determination was painted in the faintest colours.

Nevertheless, whether as social engineering or a means for correction of childhood, education has been facing a continuing situation of crisis, transforming the need for reform in its main form of self-description (Baraldi & Corsi, 2016). It was only in the early 1960s that the discourse in and on education came to terms to an understanding that 'the crisis of education' was the reconstruction as an item for pedagogical and political agendas of the structural limit of education (Arendt, 1993). Such limit concerns the impossibility for education, as for any other form of communication, to control the how the observer makes sense of the information and motivations underpinning communication, and therefore how the observer reacts to it.

As it is well known by any educational practitioners, from Early to Higher Education, no educational intention, even if enhanced by the most refined technology, can direct the development of children's personality. This claim might not come as a surprise, and it is underpinned by philosophical pragmatism already, and particularly by James' point that the development of a child's mind cannot be completely controlled by any educational technique, due to the independence of psychic processes of mean-

ing-making, that are inaccessible from the outside (James, 1983). James introduces the idea of an inescapable role of the child in its own development, which can be integrated with a reference to Portes' claim that in any social relationship, a possible derailing factor for intentions is that participants may react in contingent ways and devise means of by-passing the intended consequences of actions (Portes, 2000). Even the clearest goal and the most advanced pedagogical means cannot secure that educators' actions will have the intended consequences (Vanderstraeten, 2004). Unintended, and often significant, consequences that the educators cannot control, and of which they are often unaware, are a necessary companion to any educational intention.

In sum, unintended consequences are always possible in education, also with very young children, as convincingly demonstrated by Dotson and colleagues with regard to the strategies implemented by toddlers to subvert meal-time discipline in American nurseries (Dotson et al., 2015), and by Scollan and Gallagher with regard to the use of 'forbidden' technological apparatuses (Scollan & Gallagher, 2016). It is true that unintended consequences are one of the building blocks of modern liberal economics: Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', maybe the most famous metaphor in social science, is an example of unintended consequence. Smith maintained that each individual, seeking only his own gain, is led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention, that end being the public interest. In the influential article titled 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action' (1936), Merton extends the analysis of the concept of unintended consequences from its economical original context to all social systems. Since Merton's ground-breaking article, the problem of unintended and unanticipated consequences has pertained not only to economic science, but also to the effectiveness of practices and social planning, with obvious implications for education that is the most ambitious social system advocating to itself the task to produce and preserve the presuppositions of social cohesion through the systemic socialisation of children. The ambitious task that education sets for itself underpins the relevant amount of pedagogical publications that recognise it as the medium for the transmission of the moral values that represent the foundations of society (Kymlicka, 2008). For instance, Lawton et al. (2005), as much as Batho (1990), demonstrate, at least with regard to the English contexts, how education has been claiming the task of securing the development of democratic citizens through civic education. This concerns Early Years Education, as 'education to fundamental (British) values' has become a mandatory component for all Early Years settings (Lloyd, 2015).

Notwithstanding high hopes nurtured by education's self-description, pedagogical theories have been experiencing severe difficulties in avoiding

the unintended consequences of educational intentions. For Merton, the functions of a social practice are its “observable objective consequences” (Merton, 1957). Manifest functions are those outcomes that are intended and recognized by the agents concerned; latent functions are those outcomes that are neither intended nor recognized. Although the distinction between manifest and latent functions has been the object of sociological critical accounts (Campbell, 1982), pedagogical research towards the unintended consequences of an educational system that aims to rationalize socialization still utilises it as an important analytic concept (see Kendall, 1998). However, differently from pedagogy, sociological research on education has not always been concerned about the unintended consequences in the field of education; for Parsons and Bales (1965), socialization (which includes education) fulfils an unambiguous role within society. Moving from the theoretical presupposition that human beings are open systems, exchanging input and output with the environment, socialization is understood by Parsons as input delivered to individuals by and through their social environment; the output of this operation would consist in the transformation of individuals’ inner structure, making it fit with the norms and value orientations of the society in which they live. A concurrent sociological theoretical approach to education, which is here advocated as more realistic, pays attention to the mutual operational closure of psychic systems and social systems, suggesting that it is not possible to describe socialization in terms of the transfer of a meaning pattern from one system (society) to the other (the individual) (Baraldi, 1993). In fact, the interaction between a psychic system and his or her social environment might or might not provoke structural changes in the ‘inner sphere’ of the individual (Vanderstraeten, 2000). Provoked by studies from the emerging field of Childhood Studies since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sociology of education has been devoting debates and research to the exploration of children’s agency in education (Colombo, 2012).

Within this theoretical model, the concept of ‘unintended consequences’ should be taken into account by a sociological analysis of education: when a pedagogically stylized act communicates its own intention, the person who is expected to be educated acquires the freedom to travel some distance, for instance, to pursue the intention out of mere opportunism, or to avoid ‘being educated’ as much as possible (Vanderstraeten, 2006). The realism of the pedagogical models based on the transmission of knowledges from the adult to the child has been questioned (Colombo, 2009), also with regard to Early Years Education (Baraldi, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford, 2008). Thus, an interesting question for educators and educational scientists concerns the possibility of reducing unintended consequences of pedagogical action.

## The problem of trust for education, in education

Education “is action that is intentional and attributable to intentions” (Luhmann, 1995, p. 244); the reference of the educational action is the pupil, and the standardised expectations about its learning allow to observe the effect of education and the need for reform, either of education or of the pupil. Whilst the *socialisation of the child* only requires the possibility of reading the behaviour of others as selected information such as potential dangers or social expectations (Vanderstraeten, 2000), the *education of the pupil*, and this is true from Early Years Education onwards, aims to generate standardised learning patterns that cannot be left to chance socializing events but presupposes coordinating a plurality of efforts.

However, education cannot be conceived as a rational form of socialization, because it cannot eliminate the possibility of resistance because children’s psychic systems are inaccessible, while the pupils is nothing else than a persona created by education itself. In fact, intentional communication with educational goals doubles the motives for rejection. In any communication, the meaning can be rejected if the addressee or receiver finds the information unsatisfactory and/or the intention unacceptable (Vanderstraeten & Biesta, 2006). Research suggests that even at very young age children actively participate to educational communication, selecting whether to accept it or not (Bjork-Willen, 2008). The addressee can reject the educational communication, if he or she refuses the role of someone who needs to be educated.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding its improbability, education happens and children, often from a young age, are included in educational organisations, and become objects and subjects of educational discourses. If pedagogy cannot secure the reproduction of the educational relationships, what is the resource that support the reproduction of education? What can support children’s acceptance of the educational intention, of teaching, of teachers’ requests of learning and teachers’ evaluation or correction?

The question is particularly intriguing, as it draws attention to the position of children in the education system, which represent for most of them a crucial context of social experiences. What can support such acceptance where children’s position is one of exclusion? The answer reminds to the function of a specific medium of communication, a medium specialising in creating the conditions for the acceptance of communication. This medium is trust (Luhmann, 1988). A crucial theoretical claim, which is pivotal for the argument presented here but also underpins all contributions is that children’s trusting commitment in the interaction with adults is vital for the reproduction of education. More than any other social system in modern society, education needs trust of children for its reproduction. Without

children's trusting commitment, education could not exist. Lack of trust activates a vicious circle between lack of trust and low social participation (Farini, 2012) that circle implies losing opportunities of children's action, reducing their preparation to risk trust, and activating anxiety and suspicion for educators' actions. Distrust in interactions with specific educators can determine children's marginalization or self-marginalization in the education system, with possible drop-out and consequent reduction of effectiveness of education in society; these may be understood as unintended consequences of education. Education is particularly affected by lack of trust that creates perverse effects as alienation, prevents commitment and leaves the floor to disappointment of expectations. Vanderstraeten (2004) describes in systemic terms a positive feedback between distrust and avoidance of educational intention, where the increment in the value of one component simultaneously contributes to the growth of the other. The advancement of the discussion now demands undertaking reflection on the sources of trust as a medium of acceptance for communication.

Firstly, trust can guarantee basic presuppositions of action and relationships when it is referred to expertise. This is the case for classic pedagogy, and for the current revival of teacher-centred stance, postulating the dependence of children's commitment to education exclusively, or primarily, on their trust in adults' expert guidance, counselling and teaching (Vanderstraeten & Biesta, 2006; Britzman, 2007). Children need to trust both the specific educational interactions and the education system. Children cannot consider all the complexities of the unfamiliar world of education, therefore knowledge cannot support decision-making; rather, children engage with teaching, assessment or any other social situation based on their trust in the system. It is agreed with Luhmann (1995) that trust in the system is easier to acquire than trust in the person. Trust in the system, differently from trust in the person, it is a necessity for participation in most social contexts (Giddens, 1991). A great majority of individuals cannot not trust expert systems, including education system, to participate in basic social activities. It is an attitude of trust that transcends personal decision-making (Faulkner, 2015). Trust commitments towards the expertise of teachers and educational professionals are a necessity for inclusion in social processes that are often made opaquer by organisational arrangements (Hawley, 2014). Trust in expertise supports the acceptance of hierarchical structures of educational interactions. Eventually, trust in expertise supports the self-identification of the child as the pupil by motivating the acceptance of educational communication, the validity of educational expectations, the acceptance of assessment.

Whilst trust in expertise is the foundation of the relationship between the *pupil* and the teacher, but has been questioned for failing to value the competences and autonomy of the *child* (Shapiro, 2002; Kelman, 2005). Trust

in expertise concerns the participation in the organisational dimension of education, in school-based learning, but the education system occupies a peculiar position, consequence of the pivotal importance of face to face interactions and personal commitments. With support from D’Cruz research (2018), it is here argued that trust must be thought as domain-specific; trust in education is intrinsically fragile and always revocable because it is not immune from the lived experiences of social interaction within the system (Boronski & Hassan, 2015). Teaching sits at the intersection between trust in the system and experience of participation in the system. Giddens’ theory of trust (1991) is particularly helpful here, with the concept of faceless commitments. Faceless commitments are a product of modernity and depend on trust in the system. Giddens argues that any subject must trust systems, because it is simply impossible to return to a situation where familiarity, that is, full first-hand knowledge, extends to all experiential domains. The educational experience is accessed by children through a system that is largely non-transparent for the children (as well as for the professionals working in it!). Participation in education demands trust based on faceless commitments which is embedded in the semantics of education with regard to teacher-pupil interactions. Nevertheless, an interesting aspect of Giddens’ theory is that it does not underestimate the connections between trust in the system and trust in personal trust. Teaching is a situation where the child, who vastly ignores most aspects of a system that nevertheless the child trusts as a pupil, encounters the system face to face. Teaching is thus an empirical example of an intense interaction that either reinforces trust or reinforces sceptical attitudes towards systems. Giddens calls these situations access points, where the trusting relationship between the individual and the system becomes real or, using the vocabulary of Idealistic philosophy, where the relationship is actualized. Access points are situations where the individual evaluates the trustworthiness of the system (O’Neill, 2018). Besides the pupil’s trust in expertise, the child’s trust, or distrust, towards the education system is not indifferent to lived experiences of teaching, because trust is necessarily relational and levels of trust depend on circumstantial life-experiences. Domenicucci and Holton describe the interactive expansions or retreat of trust as a *two-places relation* (Domenicucci & Holton, 2017). If the perspective of the system is taken instead of the perspective of children, access points remain crucial spaces, characterized by a tension between the system and lay scepticism that make the system vulnerable.

Entering the classroom, the child has limited knowledge of the system’s culture, expectations and procedures. The pupil trusts the expertise of the system, but the child who represent the other side of the pupil still faces an unfamiliar environment. This applies the education system as well as to the specific educational institution as a local system, because each individual

organisation has specific sets of rules and procedures that secure differentiation from the social environment surrounding it (Luhmann, 1982). The teacher represents the expert system that the pupil must trust in exchange to his/her inclusion in it. However, trust is dynamic and relational and during teaching the interaction can either strengthen the child's trust or alternatively awaken suspicions and distrust (Mitchell et al., 2018). Teaching is the access point to education and the educational institution where experiences are made that will impact on the children's trust in the institution, on the children's trust in the education system and on the children's trust the possibility of actively participating in education.

Critical pedagogy and sociological childhood studies have questioned the effectiveness of teachers' expertise in promoting children's trusting commitment. According to childhood studies, children's opportunities of participation in educational settings are strongly reduced "by curricular and behavioural rules and structures" (Wyness, 1999, p. 356), that is, by the latent functions of the education system are fulfilled alongside of the official curricula. In education, the reduced opportunities for participation available to the *pupil*, result in less opportunity for the *child* to learning trust by taking risk and engaging in social relationships.

### **Trust based on categorical inequalities and its implications**

Not included in the repertoire of sources of trust presented by Giddens (1990; 1991), therefore making its discussion a genuine contribution of this article to sociological research, is a second source of trust connected to the organisational dimension of education: trust based on categorical inequalities. The theoretical underpinning of this construct may be recognized in Tilly's claim that inequality becomes embedded in the organizational structures (Tilly, 1998). This is particularly true for education, which is a system where inequality among individual performances and among goals attainment is at the same time a basic structural feature and an expected output. Tilly elaborates an inventory of causal mechanisms through which categorical inequality is generated by and sustained in organizations. Tilly argues that certain kinds of social structural relations are solutions to problems generated within social systems. This is not argument for a smooth, homeostatic kind of functionalism in which all social relations organically fit together in fully integrated social systems. The functional explanations in Tilly's arguments allow for struggles and contradictions. Nevertheless, his arguments rely on functional explanations insofar as at crucial steps of the analysis he poses a problem generated by a set of social relations and then presents the demonstration that a particular social form is a solution to the problem as the explanation of that social form.

Categorical forms of inequality among pupils can be created in education through selection. Categorical distinctions make easier to discern who and when to trust and who and when avoiding risks. As Tilly puts it: “organizational improvisations (and educational selection can be ascribed to this category) lead to durable categorical inequality”. Pupils are categorized according to their performances, and such categorical distinctions become stable features of organization. Most importantly for this discussion, categorical distinctions can be used as references for the differentiated allocation of trust commitments in the teacher-pupil relationship, thus enhancing the stability of educational communication. This latter point demands further explanation. Tilly distils the core explanation of categorical inequality to three positions: (1) Organizationally installed categorical inequality reduces risks. Categorical inequalities support the decision-maker in the risky choice whether to accord trust or not in any specific situation. This is a claim about the effects of categorical inequality on the stability of organizational relationships: the former stabilizes the latter; (2) Organizations whose survival depends on stability tend to adopt categorical inequality. This is a selection argument: the functional trait, categorical inequality, is adopted because it is functional, that is, solves the problem of stability, (3) Because organizations adopting categorical inequality deliver greater returns to their dominant members, and because a portion of those returns goes to organizational maintenance, such organizations tend to crowd out other types of organizations. Tilly’s model is readily applicable to educational organization, where the categorical inequalities generated from selection offer a reference for the allocation of trust. This is a self-constructed mechanism to reduce anxiety. In educational situations, categorical distinctions make it easier to know whom to trust and whom to exclude.

Categorical inequalities become stable features of organization because they enhance the survival of organizations that have such traits, and that as a result over time organizations with such traits predominate. The adoption of the organizational trait in question may be a conscious strategy intentionally designed to enhance exploitation and opportunity hoarding, but equally it may result from quite haphazard trial and error. However, whilst stabilizing social relationships, categorical inequalities stabilize position of marginalization for some pupils. The stabilization of educational organizations based on categorical inequalities and differentiated allocation of trust commitments support their reproduction in condition of improbability. Nevertheless, it presents a paradoxical consequence: categorical inequalities reduce the potential of educational organizations in accomplishing their institutional goal, that is, the planned socialisation of *all* children. Considering Tilly’s inventory of causal mechanisms through which categorical inequality is generated and sustained by organizations, it appears clear that trust based

on categorical inequalities can be understood as a condition, and a consequence, of the reproduction of the educational organisations. Trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities are intertwined: while educators' expertise legitimizes them as evaluators in institutionalized selective events, selective events produce the material references to build and develop categorical inequalities. The two sources of trust are coupled: the effects of one form are the presuppositions of the other. In the education system, educators' expertise creates the material foundations of categorization, and trust based on categorical inequalities builds systems of social closure, exclusion and control, where children may experience anxiety about the future outcome of present actions, favouring risk-avoidance behaviour and conformity. However, trust based on categorical inequalities is only one side of the picture, that necessarily brings dis-trust based on categorical inequalities with it. The problems of institutional distrust are well known, and described in terms of a spiralling relationship between marginalization of some pupils and their alienation from educational communication.

Not surprisingly, considering the limitations of trust based on expertise in motivating children's trusting commitment, and in light of the cost of trust based on categorical inequalities in terms of the exclusion of children, a concern for education is to reflect on other possible sources of trust to sustain children's acceptance of education.

### **Affective trust in education and its relationship with children's agency**

Both trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities leave the floor to problems of institutional distrust. However, and this introduces a third source of trust in education, trust can also be generated through interpersonal affective relationships that mobilise trust through a process of mutual disclosure. In this second case, the trusting commitment concerns the relationship in itself, a 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1991), and trust results in a demand for intimacy. Interpersonal affective relationships seem to be much more motivating than expertise. Since the 1980's, childhood studies have been challenging the ontological foundation of adult's expertise and control as a source of trust in the relationships between children and adults. According to a rich literature child cannot be considered passive recipients of adults' information and command; on the contrary, they are social agents who actively participate in the construction of social systems (James et al., 1998). The continuity with the pragmatist philosophy of the early twentieth century is evident. Children have their own agendas and concerns which may go beyond the institutional scopes of education and the mere self-interest in educational career; the educational relationship is a

different environment for adults and children, who may consider risk which are neglected by adults. Therefore, social attention moves towards children's trusting commitment and necessity of building trust in their relationships with adults (Holland & O'Neill, 2006), also regarding Early Years Education (Burger, 2013). When looking at educational practices, sociological research has been revealing that mainstream education are centred around standardised role performances, with a relatively limited range of variations over many years (Parsons & Bales, 1965; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979; Vanderstraeten, 2004; Farini, 2011; Walsh, 2011). However, if the object of sociological research shifts from mainstream education to pedagogical experiments and innovation, the importance of agency in the construction of children's trust in education within innovative practice is revealed, even from a pre-scholar age (Baraldi, 2015; Harris & Kaur, 2012). At the same time, research focusing not on educational practices but on young people approach to education suggests that, right at the gates of the education system agency already plays a pivotal at the intersection between social capital and the definition of personal trajectories, for instance regarding school choice (Colombo, 2011). The exercise of individual agency appears to be a component of young people's social semantics that can be transferred within educational practices. As a condition to develop person-centred approaches in critical pedagogy, it is suggested that adults should risk interpersonal affective relationships with pupils, listening to their personal expressions and supporting them empathically (Rogers, 1951). In other words, childhood studies advocate the inclusion of the child in the education, from its early, pre-scholar, stages (Károly & Gonzales, 2011), questioning the measure in which trust can be built between the adult and the pupil.

Agency is key to the development of trusting commitments that are *stronger* and more *complex* than trust based in expertise, and more *inclusive* that trust based on categorical inequalities, where inclusiveness refers to working together *with* young people rather than *on* young people, recognising that citizenship practices within education are significant for education (Colombo, 2012).

A certain degree of agreement within childhood studies is observable regarding the semantic of agency. Agency is observed when individual actions are not considered as determined by another subject (James 2009; James & James, 2008; Baraldi, 2014). However, the concept of agency implies that individuals 'interact with the social conditions in which they find themselves' (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 380), acknowledging limitations imposed by social constraints (Bjerke, 2011; James, 2009; James & James, 2008; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Valentine, 2011; Wyness, 2014).

Agency and its social conditions are visible in social interactions (Bae, 2012; Baraldi, 2014; Baraldi & Iervese, 2014; Bjerke, 2011), where agency can be

observed in the availability of choices of action and the agent's possibility to exercise a personal judgement and to choose according to it (Markstrom & Hallden, 2009; Moss, 2009). In other words, adults are invited to consider that children are social agents who can and must tackle important issues, "dancing" with them (Holdsworth, 2005, p.150). This claim is both ideological and theoretically founded, with a clear reference to constructivism and the postulate of the unavoidable independence of psychic systems as processors of communication and communicative intentions (Luhmann refers to the *intransparency* of psychic systems for communication, 1995). These ideas have inspired the concept of promotion of children's agency in education, supporting children's self-expression, taking their views into account, consulting them, involving them in decision-making processes, sharing power and responsibility for decision making with them (Matthews, 2003).

It is argued here that the transformation of the cultural presuppositions of education towards the recognition of children's agentic role is important for the construction of children's citizenship in the education system (Percy-Smith, 2010), which requires the recognition of their personal rights and their empowerment at the crossroads between the realization of rights and the exercise of individual liberties (Besozzi, 2014). This is true also for Early Education, which has been approached by a young but flourishing research stream as a possible context for children's citizenship, centred around the recognition of young children as agents (Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012; Lansdown, 2004; 2005). Based on a critical assessment of the theoretical presuppositions foundation of pedagogical tradition, a discourse on the child in education has emerged, colouring an image of the its capabilities and agency in the brightest shades of self-determination.

### **From the *pupil* back to the *child*?**

Positioning the child as agent in the education system, entails important consequences for the reproduction of the system itself, because it allows building trust based on the experience of active, practised, citizenship (Lawy & Biesta, 2006; Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Seele, 2012), therefore avoiding the risk of marginalization and feelings of alienation that are the unintended consequences of education and trust based on categorical inequalities. Promoting children's agency can be seen as a way to build trust through the exercise of agency (Farini, 2012). However, the promotion of children's agency may meet important obstacles in conditions of radical distrust, which prevent from the construction of person-centred relationships and affective expectations (Farini & Baraldi, 2013; Farini, 2014). According to Luhmann (1995), while trust enlarges the range of possible actions in a social system, distrust restricts this range, in that it requires additional premises for so-

cial relationships, which protect interactants from a disappointment that is considered highly probable. When distrust is established, building trust appears very difficult because the interaction is permeated by trust in distrust. This appears to be the current condition of mainstream education, where trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities generates distrusts on an interpersonal level (for a case study on the connection between categorical inequalities and marginalisation in education see O'Connor and Angus 2013).

Ultimately, the challenge for education is to establish the conditions for mutual trust, that is, mutual humanization and mutual reassurance, based on acknowledgment of participants' needs and fears as well as based on responsiveness to them. Using Buber's powerful language (Buber, 2004), the challenge consists in the transformation of educational relationships from an 'I to It' model, where the 'other' is the project of our expectations and planning (the *It*, the pupil), to an 'I to Thou', model, based on the acknowledgment of the incommensurable alterity of the 'other' (the *Thou*, the child). Pedagogical innovation aiming to create the condition for children's citizenship in the education system has been the object of sociological research interested in evaluating if and how mutual trust can be created *through*, rather than *despite* teaching. Since the 1990s, sociological studies have addressed dialogic teaching, suggesting that it can create conditions of negotiation and communication in classrooms by acknowledging that children are active participants in constructing meanings and social practices, influencing the cultural and social situations in which they are involved (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Baraldi & Iervese, 2012; 2017; Farini, 2019). Dialogic teaching is defined as that in which both teachers and pupils make substantial and significant contributions and through which *children's thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward* and through which *teachers can encourage children to participate actively* (Mercer & Littleton, 2007, p. 41). The value of children's educational experience is affected by the extent to which teaching "enables them to appreciate the purpose of the activities they do, and how these activities fit together into a meaningful sequence of events" (Mercer & Littleton, 2007, p. 55). Dialogic teaching requires facilitation of classroom interaction, in which the teacher is an *organiser of learning* (Holdsworth, 2005, p. 149). Facilitative dialogic teaching is a specific form of teaching based on methodologies of facilitation. It aims to create the opportunity to negotiate and share individual contributions in communication and particularly in interactions, valuing the positive involvement of all participants in classroom relationships. Recent international action-research at the intersection of pedagogical innovation and sociology of communication, supported by the European Commission (Erasmus+ 2015-2018 Project 'Shared Memories and Dialogue', [www.sharmed.eu](http://www.sharmed.eu)) has demonstrated the possibility for fa-

ilitation to successfully create the conditions for mutual trust that support children's active citizenship in the classroom (Baraldi et al., 2018). Facilitation is conceived as a range of actions able to change educational patterns by promoting children's active participation in educational interactions (Baraldi & Iervese, 2012). The practice of facilitation emphasizes the production of different perspectives, in displaying and managing predefined assumptions, doubts, divergent interpretations, different stories and experiences, unpredicted emotions. Facilitation enhances and manages different perspectives, it is a strategy enhancing co-operative and relation-oriented interactions. In classroom interactions, facilitation makes it possible to coordinate and manage children's active participation and relationships and assure learning-outcome through post-activity feedback and reflection (Baraldi et al., 2018). Facilitation is a form of communication where the reference is the child, not the pupil, bringing complexity, unpredictability but also individual agency and rights into educational communication. Facilitation provokes education, if an inclusive and complex form of trust should be created, to substitute the pupil with the child, as the internal reference of the education system.

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